

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

April 7, 2011

U.S. Makes Progress on Trans-Pacific Trade.....	1
Plans to Slow Superbugs Focus for World Health Day 2011	1
State’s Carson Renews U.S. Call for Credible Nigerian Elections	2
From Humble Beginnings, Qadhafi Offers a Study in Power	3
At Hearing, U.S. Cites Positive Outlook in Ties to South Asia	4

U.S. Makes Progress on Trans-Pacific Trade

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has made important progress in enhancing global trade through the latest round of Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, says U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk.

According to a USTR announcement, the trade partnership made considerable progress through the talks, “giving a strong boost to their efforts to develop a high-standard, 21st-century trade agreement that will support the creation and retention of jobs and promote economic growth.”

The trade partnership is becoming a critical element for “unlocking the Asia-Pacific region to U.S. business,” Kirk said in congressional testimony April 5.

The TPP, created in 2006 by Singapore, New Zealand and Chile, aims to promote regionwide economic cooperation. Officials from the nine current TPP member economies — Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and the United States — held the sixth round of negotiations in late March.

In addition to making headway toward the key goal of developing the text of the group’s agreement, the announcement said, each country also began to show the flexibility needed to successfully conclude negotiations.

“As a result, the teams were able to narrow the gaps in their positions on a wide range of issues across the more than 25 chapters of the agreement,” the USTR announcement said.

To maximize progress, the TPP countries extended the length of the discussions in Singapore, and some U.S. negotiators also traveled to Malaysia and Vietnam before and after the formal talks to advance market-access negotiations.

Before the start of negotiations, TPP countries held a seminar with more than 50 involved parties from business, civil society and academic groups. U.S. representatives from organizations representing a wide range of interests made presentations.

The USTR announcement said countries had good exchanges on initial U.S. proposals on “cross-cutting issues of competitiveness and facilitating business, how to promote the participation of small- and medium-sized businesses in international trade” and promoting development.

The seventh round of talks will be held during the week of June 20 in Vietnam. As in Singapore, this round will be extended to give negotiators the opportunity to further advance their work. The TPP members are seeking to make as much progress as possible ahead of the 21-member Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Meeting in November in Honolulu.

Plans to Slow Superbugs Focus for World Health Day 2011

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Public health experts warn that medical science could return to an era when doctors had no tools against infection, and they want the public to help prevent that.

Anti-microbial resistance — or AR — is the focus for World Health Day on April 7. AR is the medical term to describe bacteria that have built up defenses against the medicines we throw at them. The World Health Organization (WHO) has adopted the slogan, “No Action Today, No Cure Tomorrow” to focus attention on the issue.

“Urgent and consolidated efforts are needed to avoid regressing to the pre-antibiotic era,” WHO declares on its website, announcing its intent to deliver on April 7 a coordinated plan to slow AR.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a partner in the WHO campaign, and Dr. Arjun Srinivasan heads up infection prevention programs for the federal agency in Atlanta, Georgia. He says frequently occurring infections routinely cured by antibiotics today have the potential to become superbugs that can’t be subdued by readily available or currently known medications.

“An ear infection; meningitis, a serious infection of the spinal cord; pneumonia; infections of the urinary tract; infections of wounds — all of these were infections that, before the development of antibiotics, weren’t really treatable,” Srinivasan said in an interview. “The patient either got better or didn’t, and there was nothing we could do.”

Srinivasan, an infectious disease specialist, says two things must be done to prevent the emergence of more bacterial infections that are difficult, if not impossible, to cure with existing medical tools. Science has to develop new drugs, and practitioners and patients need to be better informed about the use of antibiotics and infection prevention behaviors.

The first one — creating new drugs — is difficult and

does not promise immediate answers. Medicines that attack the weak spots in bacteria are already invented, so a new line of attack on bacteria must first be identified before new drugs are even in sight.

The second strategy — using more caution with antibiotics — is easier. Srinivasan says research has found that up to 30 percent of everyday antibiotic use is unnecessary, so changing that is an immediate imperative.

“People [are prescribed antibiotics who] don’t have bacterial infections at all, or they get antibiotics for too long [a course of treatment],” he said.

The more antibiotics swirling through human bloodstreams, the greater the chance that bacteria can become resistant to them. The humble bacterium can’t be cast as the villain in this story. In becoming resistant to the drugs that would attack it, the bacterium is just trying to defend itself, and create grandchildren that are stronger and better able to survive. And even if science does concoct new medicines in the near future, bacteria are going to keep on trying to defend themselves, evolving to become resistant to new attackers.

“We’ve got to work very hard on strategies to prevent the development of resistance in the first place because that’s what’s going to help us preserve the effectiveness of the antibiotics we have now,” Srinivasan said. “It’s what is going to make new antibiotics last longer.”

In the United States, a bacteria known as MRSA (for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is one of those that can’t be subdued with common antibiotics such as penicillin or oxacillin. The CDC estimates that it causes thousands of deaths each year, with most cases originating in hospitals where hygienic practices have not been properly followed.

State’s Carson Renews U.S. Call for Credible Nigerian Elections

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The top U.S. diplomat to Africa urged Nigerians to participate in their country’s local, state and national elections, which are scheduled to begin April 9 after having had been postponed for a week, and said the United States is closely monitoring Nigeria’s political environment and wants the country to hold a credible and transparent electoral process.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said April 5 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that the country needs to take the opportunity presented by the voting to realize its

democratic aspirations and overcome its long legacy of flawed elections.

Nigerians were due to vote for their National Assembly on April 2, but the country’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) postponed the process a few hours into the polling because voting materials failed to arrive on time at numerous polling places across the country. The assembly elections are now scheduled for April 9, and will be followed in the coming weeks by presidential and local elections.

“We share the disappointment of INEC and the Nigerian people that this important electoral event had to be postponed, and we renew our call for credible and transparent elections in this critically important African country,” Carson said.

He said reports indicating that a significant number of Nigerians peacefully turned out to vote April 2 offer “a positive indication of their democratic aspirations.” He encouraged “all Nigerians to exercise their rights as citizens to vote and to have their votes counted openly and transparently” despite the poor start to the process.

Carson also offered praise for INEC’s chairman, Attahiru Jega, and said Jega’s appointment has brought his position “much-needed integrity and competence,” and inspired many Nigerians to “become far more active and involved in the electoral process and to insist on greater transparency to combat fraud.”

Jega’s appointment has also “raised expectations that this year’s elections would meet minimum standards of credibility,” he said. But “one man alone cannot overcome significant systemic and logistical challenges” or transform “a political culture in which stolen elections have become the norm for decades.”

Nigeria, Carson said, “has not had credible national elections since 1993.”

The United States is looking for Nigeria to improve upon the “deeply flawed” 2007 elections, which were accompanied by vote rigging, the theft of ballot boxes and violence. The official results of the process “had no basis in reality,” Carson said, and the process “in no way reflected the ability and the capacity of the Nigerian people to organize and run successful elections.”

The 2007 vote also represented “a major setback for democracy not only in Nigeria, but across Africa.” Carson said no one has yet been held accountable for electoral fraud and mismanagement.

As Africa’s most populous country and its second-largest economy, “What happens in Nigeria has consequences

not only for Africa but for the United States and the entire global community," Carson said. The Obama administration is closely monitoring the country's political environment.

"Our government will not turn a blind eye to a repeat of the political violence and wholesale electoral theft that took place in 2007," he said. "If Nigeria's current elections are not a significant improvement over the 2007 elections and if the current elections do not meet the expectations of a majority of Nigeria's people, Nigeria and Nigeria's citizens will lose confidence in their leaders, their democratic institutions and the capacity of the country to sustain a democratic trajectory in the future."

The United States also intends to take "appropriate measures" against "individuals who violate basic democratic norms," just as it has done with leaders and officials in Côte D'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Madagascar. Any violence perpetrated against voters or candidates is unacceptable and "casts a dark shadow over the entire electoral process," he said.

African nations are scheduled to hold 17 national elections in 2011. Carson said that although there is more to democracy than elections, the electoral process should be seen across the continent as "an important barometer of overall governance."

Beginning April 9, "Nigeria has an historic opportunity to allow the Nigerian people the opportunity to elect their local, state and national representatives in a climate free of violence and intimidation," he said.

From Humble Beginnings, Qadhafi Offers a Study in Power

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — The Libyan government was corrupt, its leader out of touch with his people, and those who rose against him in Benghazi were young, idealistic and unknown.

The year was 1969, not 2011, and the leader of the coup was Muammar Qadhafi.

Historians who have studied Libya's longtime leader describe him as compelling and contradictory, remarkable for his rise and then for the approach he took to maintaining power for more than 41 years.

"He'll be a case study for many dictators of the future. They will look at him and say, 'How did he do it?'" said Mansour O. El-Kikhia, a Libyan-born professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio and author of Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction. "This is really a

unique model of dictatorship, a unique model of repression, where the repression takes place and the leader says, 'Oh, I had nothing to do with that. The people did that. I hold no authority.'"

Qadhafi, the serious-minded and devout son of nomads of the Sirte Desert, was by all accounts a bright and idealistic youngster and young man inspired by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser helped overthrow the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, when Qadhafi was about 10, and became Egypt's president in 1956, preaching Arab nationalism and opposition to foreign empires.

"Qadhafi represented a perspective of the Arab mind of the 1950s, more than anything else, and that originally came from Nasser," El-Kikhia said. "He memorized Nasser's speeches ... and Nasser's speeches go on for four hours. So when you start memorizing Nasser's speeches by heart, it shows some commitment to not only an ideology and a person, but to a way of life and of thinking. Unfortunately, Nasser died [in 1970] before he could actually tame Qadhafi, if you like. And it's like a child who was not tamed, in a way, who was not taught."

Although Qadhafi was an unknown sublieutenant when his Free Unionist Officers overthrew Libya's monarchy in September 1969, he had been working toward that for years as a teenage student activist and then more quietly as a university student, military academy trainee and army officer. His new government fulfilled its promises to Libyans: Its leaders lived simply instead of feeding off corruption; it negotiated a better price for Libyan oil; it used the money to improve the lives of the people; and it ended the presence of British and American military bases in Libya when their leases expired.

"At the beginning, he was doing the right thing ... in terms of being a national hero," said Mohamed A. El-Khawas, author of *Qaddafi: His Ideology in Theory and Practice*.

Just as Nasser had laid out a path that Qadhafi followed, Qadhafi tried to provide others with a blueprint for government and economic development as an alternative to Western democracy and Soviet communism: an Islam-inspired approach to direct democracy and socialism that he described in his Green Book and called the Third Universal Theory. He said the Libyan people should rule themselves, in their towns and workplaces, through local and municipal people's congresses, and nationally through a General People's Congress. But El-Kikhia and El-Khawas said that however sincere he was about his ideology, he quickly came to care more about power.

"What ideology does to you, whether you like it or not: It binds you," El-Kikhia said. "And this is why he gutted it altogether. Even his own Green Book, he doesn't follow it

anymore — he never followed it in the first place, particularly after 1979, when he rejected the people's committees. Forget the ideology: The ideology was gone."

El-Khawas said he has come to doubt that Qadhafi was ever sincere about following his theories. "I think he was playing a game," said El-Khawas, an Egyptian-born professor at the University of the District of Columbia. "What he created was a system that had a vacuum on the top, and he moved in and filled it without being accountable to someone overseeing to say, 'Yes, you can do that. No, you cannot do that.' So he became an authoritarian government, not even an autocratic government."

Qadhafi also used Libya's oil wealth to back liberation movements around the world in hopes that they would adopt his philosophy of government and look to him for leadership — "in return for a sizable foreign aid program," El-Khawas said. None did, but those he has supported have included Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, now charged with crimes against humanity, and Foday Sankoh, whose Revolutionary United Front committed atrocities in Sierra Leone.

The real power structure in Qadhafi's Libya came not through elections but through appointed revolutionary committees. "They string people up. They hang people. They do anything they want. They take over people's homes," El-Kikhia said. "They decide rules, regulations, according to what they perceive to be Qadhafi's thoughts. And they're not accountable to anyone but to him. So they're free. But on that, he tells them ... 'If I go down, you go down with me too, because you're the one who did the dirty work.'"

Qadhafi presented the image of a man of the people, who when traveling to international summit meetings would bring two goats to give him milk and a tent in which to sleep. But he fell short of his dreams on the international stage: Efforts to join Libya in a union with other Arab countries foundered, as did his vision of a united Africa with him as "king of kings."

Severe repression in Libya, the assassination of exiled Libyans who spoke against him and such acts of terrorism as the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, made Qadhafi a pariah in the West. Great Britain broke off relations in 1984 after gunfire from the Libyan embassy during a protest killed a British policewoman and wounded 10 demonstrators.

Libya helped repair its reputation internationally through a number of steps, including the surrender of two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing for trial in Scotland, compensation payments for the victims' families, a renunciation of weapons of mass destruction and

cooperation in the fight against terrorism. El-Kikhia and El-Khawas said the moves were the idea of Qadhafi's son Saif, who is considered Qadhafi's chosen successor.

El-Khawas said Qadhafi's response to the uprising against him shows that he has become delusional. "I think he's out of his head. ... He's acting irrationally, in fact, because to kill civilians and to tell them, 'If you don't love me, you deserve to die,' that is incredible," he said.

El-Kikhia said it's clear, in any case, that Qadhafi has been thoroughly corrupted by the power he has controlled for more than 40 years. "This guy had no qualms about encircling the city of Benghazi and blowing it up — just blowing it up," he said. "There was no god to tell him no. There was no conscience to tell him no. There was no one person to tell him no."

At Hearing, U.S. Cites Positive Outlook in Ties to South Asia

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. officials are offering an encouraging picture of South Asia as a region of democratic governments, strong growth and generally improving ties to the United States.

Afghanistan and Pakistan dominate U.S. news media attention, but diplomats and aid officials discussing South Asia at a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia hearing April 5 said the example other countries are following is that of India. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said that, "since 2008, democratically elected leaders govern all South Asian countries, an indication that India's thriving democracy has served as a useful model in the region."

Blake's testimony focused on India and its growing strategic partnership with the United States, which was highlighted by a visit to India by President Obama in November 2010. Blake said India's economy is growing at 8 percent a year, second-fastest among the world's major economies, which would make it the world's third-largest economy in 2025.

India's role in the U.S. economy is growing still faster: Indian investments in the United States are growing at 53 percent a year, Blake said, and its exports to the United States were up 40 percent in 2010, and its imports from the U.S. were up 17 percent.

Blake also cited Bangladesh's growing economy, improving ties to India and efforts against terrorism, climate change and other regional and global concerns. "Bangladesh has recently emerged as a strategically important regional player," he said.

Sri Lanka, he said, has had “a worrisome record on human rights” and is recovering from 26 years of a separatist uprising. Though Sri Lanka remains of strategic interest to the United States, Blake said the Obama administration and Congress believe “that our security cooperation, in many forms, should remain limited until progress has been made on fundamental human rights, democracy and governance issues, and the concrete steps necessary for a true and lasting national reconciliation.”

Nepal, which recently formed a new coalition government, came in for special praise for what Blake called its “dramatic transformation” into “a federal republic that represents and includes all minorities and ethnicities,” where political opponents are narrowing their differences on a constitution.

Members of the House subcommittee from both parties focused most of their attention on Pakistan and Afghanistan, expressing skepticism that U.S. aid in recent years had substantially improved the security of either country or their people’s opinion of the United States.

Daniel Feldman, the State Department’s deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who also testified at the hearing, conceded that U.S. efforts in those countries had encountered problems, but he cited “hard-won security and civilian gains.” He also noted: “There have been points in our history when we have disengaged from Pakistan and Afghanistan with disastrous results. We cannot afford to make that mistake again.”

Blake described South Asia as “one of the most vital regions in the world for the United States and its importance will only grow.” India, he said in his written testimony, is “the key” to fostering regional stability, and he added praise for India and Pakistan’s recent resumption of talks, including the “cricket diplomacy during the March 30 Cricket World Cup semifinal between India and Pakistan. “South Asia is one of the least regionally integrated regions in the world. Regional peace will allow South Asia to reach its full potential. Continued social and economic integration throughout South Asia has at its core India’s growing and emerging global leadership and the importance of improved ties between India and Pakistan.”

House members generally praised the U.S.-India relationship. One member, Virginia Democrat Gerald Connolly, cited India as well when he asked how the United States can reconcile its assistance programs “in light of the obvious fact that massive corruption is occurring in some of these governments.”

Blake called corruption “a huge issue right now in virtually every one of these states.” But he said the Indian government “is committed to trying to deal with this.

They have, obviously, a very open civil society, an independent judiciary, a very free parliament, all of whom are looking to address this.”

Nisha Desai Biswal, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) assistant administrator for Asia, said that the vast majority of U.S. aid goes through nongovernmental organizations and that USAID oversees its use. She said the agency also works with many countries to help them combat corruption.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)